

Mr. Speaker:

I rise today to congratulate all concerned parents who have made an enormous commitment. All parents are teachers, but these parents have accepted total responsibility for their children's learning, by schooling them at home.

Of course I am talking about the successful homeschool movement that has taken root and rapidly growing throughout United States. It is tough to be a parent. I should know since I'm the proud father of five children and seven grandchildren. But adding "teacher" to the list of responsibilities parents' face every day illustrates their incredible determination to ensure that their children get a solid education.

It has been said that in order to understand the future we must first look to the past. That is being done here. Thousands of present day students, like many of our Founding Fathers, are being taught at home.

The motives of these parents vary, but they are all good motives. Many parents didn't like the curriculum being taught their kids, or were wary of the threat of peer pressure or the presence of drugs or violence lurking in too many of our schools today

In a world where it is common to pass the buck, tens of thousands of families have adhered to the principle set forth by former President Harry Truman, saying that "the buck stops here" when it comes to their children's education.

The home schooling movement works and the numbers prove it. According to a recent, glowing report from Reuters News Services between 1.7 and 2.1 million children across the country are taught at home. This is a 29 percent jump from the number of homeschooled children in 1999.

When they are asked to compete against children from traditional schools, these students do quite well. One illustration is how often they show up in the finals of national spelling competitions. If you "google" the words "home schooled" and "spelling bee" together you will see page after page after page of success stories from places like Albuquerque, New Mexico, Oswego, New York or Fayetteville, North Carolina – as well as they national competition here in Washington D.C.

There are other examples too.

I would especially like to congratulate Braden Juengel from Edmond, Oklahoma who was recently notified that he is one of only 39 people in the United States to receive a perfect score of 36 on his ACT test. Branden has been home schooled since the second grade. He is also a National Merit Scholar Finalist and plans to either attend Oral Roberts University or my alma mater, Baylor University, next fall. I congratulate him and his parents Mr. and Mrs. Randy and Luann Juengel.

These children are living proof that the “one size fits all” approach to education is not necessarily the only or the best way for our children to learn. This is not a knock against traditional schools. My wife and I chose for all of my kids to be taught in the Putnam City public school system. But let’s remember that the first and most important teachers that children have are their parents. We show them how to eat, help them to walk and teach them to communicate.

The Reuters news article also helps dispel the mistaken myth that homeschooled kids are socially inept because they supposedly have less social interaction. Nothing could be further from the truth. Homeschooled children frequently combine for many purposes -- and they interact well. The growth of the homeschooling movement means that more and more children are learning together, just not in a traditional classroom. For example, a group of 70 homeschooling families living in a Washington suburb organize regular group field trips and extracurricular activities for their homeschooled children. They also come together for music lessons, soccer and basketball games and for art classes.

These are all ideas and events planned by parents, not school boards. Students are transported by mom or dad driving mini vans, not school buses. Home cooking beats school cafeteria food any day of the week. Education begins at home and I applaud the parents who recognize that they – not someone else – must take responsibility to assure that their children are well educated. I remind everyone: Whether you school them at home or send them to school, you as a parent have the responsibility to make sure they learn and behave. Teachers and principals may help, but parents are the ones who must accept responsibility.

I congratulate all the parents out there who made a commitment and put their children’s education first. These are parents that our Founding Fathers would find worth of praise.